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ABSTRACT

One explanation of the disproportionately low percentage of women in school administration is the commonly held assumption that men are better managers than women. As a test of this assumption, the task performances of five female high school principals were described, analyzed, and compared with those of five male high school principals. Data were collected through interviews and through structured observation of the principals' personal contacts and correspondence and the types and chronology of their daily activities. The findings indicate that the male and female principals' overall task performances were similar, especially in such areas as types and duration of different activities and pace and volume of workload. However, the female principals had higher percentages of contacts initiated by others, shorter desk work sessions during the school day (but longer sessions after school hours), higher percentages of contacts with superiors, longer phone calls and meetings, and more likelihood of carrying out planning during meetings. Discussion of possible causes and implications of these differences illustrates the need for further research on school administrator behavior and especially on sex-related differences. A table is appended comparing the principals' average times in different activities. (Author/RW)

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THE MANAGERIAL BEHAVIOR OF FEMALE HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPALS: IMPLICATIONS FOR TRAINING

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by

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Approximately two-thirds of the teachers in America are women, yet men dominate the ranks of school administration. School administrators need to be able managers, and a commonly held assumption in this country is that men are better managers than women. In order to question this assumption, this study describes and analyzes the actual task performance behavior of five female high school principals, and compares these findings with the task performance behavior of five male high school principals. In addition, the comparative data are analyzed in terms of a theoretical conceptualization of the principalship, and in terms of the characterizations of managerial work and managerial roles developed by Mintzberg (1973). The findings are interpreted in terms of their meaning for the future of women in the principalship and in terms of their implications for future qualitative research.

A Structured Interview Guide was used in the interview session with each of the female principals. Each of the five principals was observed for five days (three full days and two half days) using a modified version of the structured observation guide developed by Mintzberg. Field notes recorded during the observation period on Structured Observation Logs, designed specifically for this study, became the basis for four records: the chronological record of the principals' activities, their correspondence, their contacts with people, and an analysis of the types of activities in which they engaged.

The findings reveal that the task performance behavior of a principal seems to be determined more by the nature of the principalship than by the sex of the principal. This suggests that the assumption which has been made about administration being a "man's job" has no validity.

While the overall task performance behavior of the female and male principals was found to be similar, this study does reveal that some differences do exist.

For example, overall similarities in task performance behavior were evidenced in terms of the following: the types of activities engaged in; the percentage of time spent in different activities; polychronics or simultaneous task processing; the internally focused contact network; the preference for live verbal contacts; the high percentage of daily unscheduled activities; the high volume and fast pace of the workload; and the constant shifting of attention from one activity to another.

Task performance behavioral differences were noted between female and male principals in the following areas: Female principals had

1. a higher percentage of contacts initiated by others;
2. shorter desk work sessions during the school day and more time spent in this activity during after-school hours;
3. a higher percentage of total contacts with superiors;
4. longer average durations for scheduled meetings, phone calls, and unscheduled meetings; and
5. cooperative planning more often taking place during scheduled meetings.

These differences raise interesting questions. What connection might exist between the length of the desk work sessions and work efficiency? Superficially, it seems that shorter work sessions punctuated by interruptions might lead to a loss of efficiency and productivity because of the constant need to shift attention from one topic to another.

Does a connection exist between the finding that the female principals had shorter desk work sessions and the finding that their face-to-face

contacts were more likely to be started by others? Did others initiate more contacts with the female principals because they felt more comfortable approaching a female leader, or because they valued whatever other activity the female principal was engaged in less than they would have had she been a male? Did the female administrators encourage this type of contact initiation behavior? Did the male principals actively limit this practice?

Since access to and dissemination of information is of vital importance to a manager, another important question which needs to be explored is whether contact initiation by others enhances an administrator's ability to gather important information? Alternatively, the hypothesis that a manager needs to direct and control the information gathering process needs to be examined. In other words, is a principal more likely to get the important information s/he needs by going after it (initiating contacts) or by being more accessible and allowing others to freely speak with her/him? A related question is whether the higher percentage of initiation by others has any connection with the degree of assertiveness these female principals possess?

Another question which could be usefully examined is what is the connection between contact initiation and managerial time control? It can be argued that if a manager allows others to initiate unrestricted verbal contacts this could lead to a loss of control of the manager's time. This might or might not be a potential problem since control of time involves the ability to terminate activities as well as initiate them. In this study a record was kept of who terminated each of the female principal's contacts. About 75% of their verbal contacts were self-terminated. Thus, the female principals largely determined the amount of time they spent with each person. It would be interesting to know to what extent the male principals' termination patterns corresponded with this.

Another difference between the male and female principals is the higher percentage of phone and scheduled meeting contacts and the higher percentage of correspondence which the female principals had with their superiors. Again this finding raises several questions. What factors account for this difference? For example, do female principals reach out more to their superiors (who are predominantly men) because they are more conditioned to consult with a male superior, or was the flow initiated from the other direction, suggesting that these female principals were perceived to need more monitoring than male principals? Does the higher contact rate between female principals and their superiors impede or enhance their effectiveness as principals?

The average length of three types of verbal contacts--scheduled meetings, phone calls, and unscheduled meetings--was longer for the female principals than for the male principals. The field notes compiled by those observing these administrators indicated that they spent time "stroking" (giving supportive feedback to others during verbal contacts) members of the school community. To what extent is stroking verbal behavior sex-linked? Does the time spent "stroking" account for the differences between the mean durations for each of these contact types? What is the effect of this behavior on staff morale and managerial effectiveness?

The fifth difference between the female and male principals relates to their information processing patterns. This study identified four ways by which information could be handled: Principals could get information, give information, share information, or plan. The female principals engaged in a higher percentage of scheduled meetings which had a planning function. Some important questions connected with this difference are: When, where, and with whom do the male principals do their planning? Do female principals allow for more actual participation in the planning process? Do these different approaches to planning affect the quality and impact of the plans?

These differences in the managerial task performance behavior of the male and female principals raise important management issues and further investigation which includes the necessary statistical techniques and controls needed to yield more definitive results is proposed. This study should serve as a springboard to further research regarding administrators' behavior generally and sex-related differences in particular.

Comparison of the Chronological Record of
Male and Female Principals

Activity[a]	Male Principals Mean[b]	Female Principals Mean[c]
Totals[d]		
Total job hours observed	42.2	29.6
Total job hours not observed	-	7.6
Total after hours	11.0	12.0
Total hours worked	53.8	49.2
Activity total	746.0	336.0
Activities per full day	149.2	84.0
Desk Work		
Average duration	9.4	5.2
Percent of time	16.0	16.2
Percent of activities	6.8	20.4
Phone		
Average duration	2.2	3.3
Percent of time	5.8	8.9
Percent of activities	10.5	16.1
Scheduled Meetings		
Average duration	22.2	35.4
Percent of time	17.3	30.4
Percent of activities	3.1	4.9
Unscheduled Meetings		
Average duration	3.4	4.7
Percent of time	27.5	22.1
Percent of activities	32.7	26.6
Exchanges		
Average duration	1.0	1.0
Percent of time	9.0	4.2
Percent of activities	36.3	23.9
Personal		
Average duration	5.8	10.0
Percent of time	5.1	2.8
Percent of activities	3.6	2.0
Tours		
Average duration	13.2	10.3
Percent of time	7.7	6.7
Percent of activities	2.3	3.8
Monitoring		
Average duration	10.1	9.3
Percent of time	5.5	2.4
Percent of activities	2.2	1.3

(continued)

Activity[a]	Male Principals Mean[b]	Female Principals Mean[c]
Trips		
Average duration	29.7	44.6
Percent of time	2.2	2.3
Percent of activities	0.2	0.3
Announcing		
Average duration	1.7	
Percent of time	0.7	
Percent of activities	1.6	
Observations		
Average duration	45.4	32.1
Percent of time	2.4	4.2
Percent of activities	0.2	0.8
Processing		
Average duration	21.2	
Percent of time	0.7	
Percent of activities	0.1	
Teaching		
Average duration	9.0	
Percent of time	0.1	
Percent of activities	0.05	

[a]All times are computed in minutes unless otherwise indicated.

[b]From Martin's study.

[c]From current study.

[d]Because the principals engaged in polychronic task performance, some time periods had to be noted under two activity categories. Thus, the total time recorded for all activities is greater than the total observed job time.